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15 (a) of the provisional agenda*

PROGRAMME QUESTIONS: PROGRAMME PERFORMANCE AND IMPLEMENTATION

Updated information on the work of the Statistical Division of the United Nations Secretariat

Report of the Secretary-General

SUMMARY

The purpose of the present report is to provide updated information on agenda items where significant developments have taken place since the reports for the Statistical Commission were completed. The affected agenda items are as follows: 4 (a), System of National Accounts (SNA); 7, Service statistics; 8, Price statistics; 9 (b), Civil registration and vital statistics; 9 (c), Statistics on special population groups; 10, Environment statistics; 12 (a), General development and integration of methodological work; 13 (b), National Household Survey Capability Programme (NHSCP); and 13 (c), Social Dimensions of Adjustment (SDA) Programme and the Living Standards Measurement Study (LSMS).

* E/CN.3/1993/1.

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INTRODUCTION

1. The purpose of the present report is to provide updated information on those agenda items in respect of which significant developments have taken place since the completion of the substantive reports for those items.

I. SYSTEM OF NATIONAL ACCOUNTS (SNA)

(Item 4 (a))

2. As indicated in the report on the revision of the SNA (E/CN.3/1993/4), the Interregional Seminar on the Revision of the SNA was held at Aguascalientes, Mexico, from 5 to 9 October 1992. The Seminar was organized by the Intersecretariat Working Group on National Accounts (ISWGNA), sponsored by the Department of Economic and Social Development of the United Nations Secretariat, and hosted by the Mexican Statistical Institute. Participants from a wide variety of countries from all regions of the world contributed positive and constructive comments on substantive, implementation and future research issues as well as on the process for refining and updating the SNA in the future. They considered the revised SNA a vast improvement over its 1968 predecessor, and congratulated the authors, members of the various expert groups and ISWGNA for this very complex technical accomplishment. The report of the Seminar was reviewed and approved by the participants on the last day of the Seminar and will be made available to the Commission as a background document.

3. The Sixth Expert Group Meeting on SNA Coordination met at Aguascalientes for two days (2-3 October 1992) prior to the Interregional Seminar and for one day (10 October 1992) after the Seminar, on both occasions concerning the revision of the SNA. At the 1st meeting the experts were brought up to date on the organizational and substantive work done on the revision of the SNA since the Fifth Expert Group Meeting on SNA Coordination, held at Harare in April 1991. Discussion took place on the conduct of the Seminar to be held the following week, particularly regarding the experts' presentation of agenda items. At the 2nd meeting there was a round-table presentation of the experts' views on the deliberations and results of the Seminar. There was general agreement that the Seminar had been a success. There was also general agreement on what the contentious technical issues were. Altogether, the discussion provided valuable input to ISWGNA for the preparation of a background document on technical issues to be submitted to the Statistical Commission in February 1993 (see para. 4 below).

4. ISWGNA met several times before, during and after the Interregional Seminar on the Revision of the SNA to discuss both organizational and substantive issues as well as documentation for the twenty-seventh session of the Statistical Commission. It was agreed that, in addition to the official documentation already indicated in the provisional agenda of the Commission (see E/CN.3/1993/1), a report on technical issues prepared by ISWGNA would be

submitted to the Commission as a background document (see para. 3 above). To prepare this report, ISWGNA held a working meeting in Paris from 14 to 16 December 1992 to review and discuss the written comments received on the draft revised SNA up to 15 November 1992, as well as the comments made at the Interregional Seminar and the Sixth Expert Group Meeting. ISWGNA report on technical issues presents the final recommendations of ISWGNA on all outstanding technical issues related to the revised SNA.

5. ISWGNA also held a senior policy-level meeting in Paris on 8 November 1992 to discuss issues related to the publication of the SNA in 1993 (target date, printing and publishing etc.) and the role of ISWGNA in the implementation of the SNA.

II. SERVICE STATISTICS

(Item 7)

6. Representatives of the Statistical Division of the United Nations Secretariat (UNSTAT) participated in the 7th meeting of the Voorburg Group on Service Statistics (19-23 October 1992), hosted by the Bureau of the Census of the United States. The agenda consisted of nine sessions. Four separate sessions dealt with the questions of prices and quantities in services, international trade in services, the central product classification, and country experiences with pilot surveys; another four sessions were concerned with the preparation, testing and evaluation of model surveys of audiovisual services, telecommunications, insurance services and computer services; and one session was concerned with the host country's experience in service statistics. The 1992 meeting emphasized the importance of constructing and implementing a model survey to broaden the Group's experience with issues concerning measurement, classification and data collection. In this connection, the Group is in the process of establishing mechanisms to ensure that survey experiences will be taken into consideration for future revisions of the provisional Central Product Classification.

III. PRICE STATISTICS

(Item 8)

7. The Workshop on ESCAP Regional Specifications for Phase VI, organized by the Statistics Division of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), was held at Beijing from 21 to 25 September 1992. The Workshop was funded by the Asian Development Bank. Twenty-nine representatives from the following 18 members and associate members of ESCAP, which are participating in phase VI of the International Comparison Programme (ICP), attended the Workshop: Bangladesh, Bhutan, China, Fiji, Hong Kong, India, Indonesia, Islamic Republic of Iran, Japan, Nepal, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea, Philippines, Republic of Korea, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Thailand and Viet Nam. Representatives of UNSTAT, the World Bank, the European Centre for

World-wide Cost of Living Comparisons (EuroCost) and the Asian Development Bank also attended.

8. The Workshop discussed and finalized lists of specifications for data collection in the ESCAP region. The Workshop also agreed to a time-schedule for ESCAP regional comparison. Briefly, the plan calls for ICP participating countries to submit to the ESCAP secretariat by March 1994, price data and by July 1994, expenditure data required for processing. The Workshop suggested that a meeting be convened to review preliminary results in September 1994, and that final results be completed by the end of that year.

9. A consultation between the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) secretariat and the countries and international organizations participating and interested in the European Comparison Programme (ECP) was held in Vienna from 9 to 13 November 1992. The purpose of the consultation was to review the preliminary results of the 1990 regional exercise and to discuss methodological and organizational issues relating to the next phase of the Group II comparison. Countries in the 1990 Group II comparison were asked to give their first impressions on the preliminary results distributed at the meeting. Participants considered the overall results satisfactory; however, they decided to check the detailed data with Austria, on a bilateral basis between November 1992 and January 1993, before finalizing the Group II and European comparison results for 1990. Participants agreed on the structure and coverage of the report on the 1990 exercise. It was proposed to include in the report an annex on sources and methods of providing basic data, and countries agreed to submit additional information according to a questionnaire adopted at the consultation.

10. Discussing future work, the following countries represented at the consultation expressed their intention to join the 1993 round: Bulgaria, Croatia, Russian Federation, Slovakia and Slovenia. However, the country composition of the next Group II comparison is still an open issue. Austria will still be the coordinator of Group II in the 1993 comparison if the number of participating countries remains similar to what has been announced so far. At the consultation, the timetable of the 1993 regional comparison was adopted, setting June 1995 as the deadline to obtain numerical results.

11. The Handbook of the International Comparison Programme (ST/ESA/STAT/SER.F/62) was issued in English in November 1992. Publication of this basic manual of ICP in other languages is expected shortly.

12. The expert group meeting on the implementation of phase VI of ICP, referred to in paragraph 50 of document E/CN.3/1993/11, was held from 27 to 29 January 1993. The discussions at the meeting helped organizers at the regional and global levels to evaluate how well the preconditions of conducting a global comparison for 1993 were met and to determine what actions needed to be taken to achieve this goal. The main conclusions of the meeting will be presented to the Commission in a separate background paper.

IV. CIVIL REGISTRATION AND VITAL STATISTICS

(Item 9 (b))

13. In late 1992, as part of the International Programme for Accelerating the Improvement of Vital Statistics and Civil Registration Systems, missions were carried out to the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) and the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) to coordinate efforts and make technical and administrative arrangements for a possible workshop in each region in 1993. The close cooperation and involvement of the Statistical Divisions of ESCWA and ECA was sought for the implementation of the workshops. During the mission, countries were identified as potential participants. The provisional agendas, the technical papers to be presented for discussion and their potential authors, and the budgets were also drawn up.

14. Further, UNSTAT has issued the "Guidelines for a review and assessment of the national civil registration and vital statistics systems" in Arabic and French so as to assist participating countries in the preparation of their country reports for the workshop.

V. STATISTICS ON SPECIAL POPULATION GROUPS

(Item 9 (c))

15. An International Workshop on the Development and Dissemination of Statistics on Persons with Disabilities was organized by UNSTAT and Statistics Canada in Ottawa from 13 to 16 October 1992. The Workshop, which was conducted in French and English, provided a forum for discussion of the national work undertaken in this area by 10 countries and considered the need for international recommendations on disability statistics. It also considered the concerns of survey directors and data users in both government offices and research centres regarding the need for comparability and quality of disability data. The report of the workshop will be submitted as a background paper to the planned Expert Group Meeting on Disability Statistics to be held in 1993, subject to the availability of extrabudgetary resources for funding. The meeting is likely to take place in late 1993 in collaboration with the Central Bureau of Statistics of the Netherlands.

16. The Swedish International Development Authority (SIDA) has provided funds to UNSTAT for one year in order to prepare an efficient and standardized data collection procedure for national and international monitoring and evaluation of the World Health Organization (WHO) Community-based Rehabilitation Programmes. The activities are to be carried out in 1992 and 1993 in collaboration with WHO and will result in the production of an instruction manual for the development of survey modules covering community-based rehabilitation activities.

17. UNSTAT has coordinated disability statistics within the United Nations in a number of ways. It is collaborating with WHO in the revision of the International Classification of Impairments, Disabilities and Handicaps (ICIDH).

18. The Centre for Social Development and Humanitarian Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat, in cooperation with UNSTAT, launched the Fourth United Nations Crime Survey of Crime Trends and Criminal Justice Systems in September 1992. UNSTAT supported the survey by providing the statistical design of the questionnaire and by collecting replies from national statistical offices. Data collected will be sorted in the United Nations Criminal Justice Information Network (UNCJIN) and presented in international statistical publications.

19. A Statistical Chart on Family, funded by the International Year of the Family Voluntary Fund, is in preparation by UNSTAT.

VI. ENVIRONMENT STATISTICS

(Item 10)

20. The United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, in its Agenda 21, requested UNSTAT to make available to all member States the methodologies contained in the SNA Handbook on Integrated Environmental and Economic Accounting and to assist member States in implementing those methodologies at the earliest possible date. The harmonized development of a suitable set of sustainable development indicators by the United Nations system and other relevant international organizations was also recommended. UNSTAT was specifically requested to pursue the development of those indicators. The Conference also recommended that the activities related to development data of agencies and institutions of the United Nations system be coordinated by a "Development Watch", which would be equivalent and complementary to the United Nations Environment Programme's Earthwatch.

21. The 2nd meeting of the Intersecretariat Working Group on Environmental Data was convened at Geneva on 21 May 1992 under the auspices of the Economic Commission for Europe. It was decided that the work done for the Group by the Statistical Office of the European Communities (EUROSTAT), that is, the survey carried out to compile information on international environmental databases, would be continued and that the ECE secretariat would provide a comprehensive assessment of this experience at the next meeting of the Working Group.

22. The Working Group on International Statistical Programmes and Coordination, at its fifteenth session, requested UNSTAT to convene a task force on environment statistics. To this end, UNSTAT circulated a questionnaire to explore the actual and planned involvement of the different international organizations in the fields of environmental statistics and accounting. The results of the survey are expected to facilitate the assessment of problems and opportunities for better coordination and cooperation by the task force.

23. In preparation for the 3rd meeting of the Intergovernmental Working Group on the Advancement of Environment Statistics, held at Wiesbaden, Germany, from 14 to 18 December 1992, UNSTAT had prepared analyses of the relationship between environment statistics and environmental accounting. A tentative list of environmental indicators and indicators of sustainable development was also discussed at the meeting.

VII. GENERAL DEVELOPMENT AND INTEGRATION OF METHODOLOGICAL WORK

(Item 12 (a))

24. A principal priority has been assigned to improving the flow from all countries to UNSTAT of detailed international trade statistics by commodity and partner country in machine-readable and/or printed form. Significant amounts of statistics appear to be available in countries but do not reach UNSTAT for inclusion in the trade statistics database. A plan for improving the flow of data has been developed involving efforts by UNSTAT, the regional commissions and the international organizations that are major users of international trade statistics.

VIII. NATIONAL HOUSEHOLD SURVEY CAPABILITY PROGRAMME (NHSCP) AND SOCIAL DIMENSIONS OF ADJUSTMENT (SDA) PROGRAMME AND THE LIVING STANDARDS MEASUREMENT STUDY (LSMS)

(Items 13 (b) and 13 (c))

25. The Council of Ministers of ESCWA, in resolution 181 (XVI) of 2 September 1992, requested the Executive Secretary to contact various United Nations, Arab and other international organizations with a view to mobilizing the necessary financial resources to ensure the continuity of the Commission's regional household survey project in the ESCWA countries.